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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000356

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TAGS: PREL MOPS MARR BA IR IZ REGION OFFICIALS

SUBJECT: KING HAMAD DISCUSSES REGIONAL AFFAIRS WITH NAVCENT
COMMANDER

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary
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¶1. (C) King Hamad told NAVCENT/FIFTH FLEET Commander Vice Admiral Cosgriff April 11 that Bahrain was proud of the long-term U.S. naval presence and was happy to work with the United States in the Combined Maritime Force to defeat common enemies. The King expressed concern about threats from Iran and the recent detainment of British sailors. He called for an integrated early warning system linked with the U.S. forces and an enhanced Bahraini Coast Guard to protect its shores from small boats and helicopters launched by Iran. On Iraq, he discounted PM Maliki's leadership labeling him too close to Iran and attributed FM Zebari's perceived detachment to his desire for a strong independently operating Kurdistan. The Gulf countries' fear is from southern Iraq and Iranian-backed forces that could march further south. Vice Admiral Cosgriff reiterated the U.S. commitment to defend our friends and interests in the region and to a strong government and security in Iraq. King Hamad closed the meeting inquiring about U.S. reaction to the idea of a GCC naval command based in Bahrain, a proposal he planned to put on the table for discussion at the upcoming May 27-28 Gulf Summit consultative meeting in Riyadh.

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Close Cooperation
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¶2. (C) In their introductory meeting, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa told NAVCENT/FIFTH FLEET Commander Vice Admiral Cosgriff April 11 that Bahrain was proud of the U.S. Navy's efforts in the region, its presence in Bahrain and the friendship engendered between the two nations. The role you play is important, enemies must be defeated and we are part of that effort with our participation in the coalition maritime task forces. Admiral Cosgriff underscored Bahrain's importance in the region, and as part of the coalition. Declaring commitment to "defend our friends and our interests in the Gulf" the Admiral added that while we are not trying to provoke, we cannot let our friends be menaced.

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The Iranian Threat to Bahrain
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¶3. (C) The King expressed his concern about the recent detainment of British sailors by Iranian forces, wondering if Gulf countries need to switch tactics. Bahrain worried about the threat from helicopters and small boats because they are difficult to detect and Iran has many of them. We have capabilities, the King said, but having adequate time is the issue. We depend on your early warning system, and linking

it into our system is key. King Hamad added that the Bahrainis are planning exercises to drill for contingencies if small boats approach their coast. Iran will say that they are not attacking Bahrain, but the U.S. that is in Bahrain. But we know it is really us. He stated the need for a strong coast guard to protect Bahrain's shallow waters. We can't fight them on the coast, they would be in the midst of the population. We think Bahrain's battle with Iran would have to be in the sea or air. The King called on Bahraini and coalition forces to work together "just as we went into Kuwait under General Schwarzkopf."

¶4. (C) Admiral Cosgriff noted that coalition interaction further south in the Gulf tended to be with the Iranian navy who were mostly professional in their dealings with coalition ships. In the northern Gulf, the IRGC is "less than polite."

The Admiral stated that coalition sailors boarded ships on the basis of intercepting smuggling to Iraq, not as an affront to Iran. "Now we have to prepare our people to anticipate that reaction."

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And In Iraq
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¶5. (C) Turning to Iraq, the King stated that unlike previous times under Saddam, Iraq is incapable of invading Iran. Now it is the opposite, and we worry about the influx of large numbers of Iranians in Iraq, and their potential to invade Kuwait. He indicated the Kuwaiti leadership had sent a message recently urging the need to meet and discuss security of the Gulf, meaning Kuwait. Withdrawal of the U.S. from Iraq is worrying us, and staying in Iraq is worrying Americans. A strong government in Iraq to show resolve

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against Iran and keep it in check is good for us. The King disparaged the leadership of Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki and other ministers around him labeling them "half Iranian." Acknowledging a need for a mix in the government, he pointed to former PM Ayad Allawi as an example of a strong Shia leader who is not viewed as a friend of Iran. King Hamad said the Kurdish leadership is also problematic. Foreign Minister Zebari does not care if things go worse, he even wants it, because if it does, this is good from his perspective for Kurdistan, which is basically operating independently. President Talabani is the same, he added. The Iranians are in Iraq because they feel the Iran-Iraq war is not over and their presence there is a continuation of that war. For the Gulf countries, he concluded, our battle is in the South against the "Khomeinis" there who threaten us. Vice Admiral Cosgriff stated that Iraq is a major focus for CENTCOM Commander Admiral Fallon. While he acknowledged that American politics do have an impact, the Admiral reiterated the U.S. commitment to a strong government and security in Iraq.

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GCC Naval Command
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¶6. (C) King Hamad asked Admiral Cosgriff his reaction to the idea of a GCC naval command formed in Bahrain which can learn from the Fifth Fleet and eventually be linked to the U.S. naval presence in the region. He pointed to the scheduled May 27-28 Gulf Summit consultative and follow-up meeting in Riyadh as a venue to introduce this new idea in preparation for further discussion at the annual GCC Summit meeting in December. The Admiral responded that it is a good idea, noting that a GCC command and coalition forces were not mutually exclusive.

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